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STATE FOR D (FRITZ), EAP/FO, AND EAP/ANP  
NSC FOR VICTOR CHA  
SECDEF FOR OSD/ISA LIZ PHU  
PACOM FOR JO1E/J2/J233/J5/SJFHQ

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TAGS: PREL PGOV NZ

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS U.S. SHOULD RECOGNIZE NZ'S  
REGIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador William McCormick,  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: According to Foreign Minister Winston Peters, his recent public observation that the United States should appreciate New Zealand's contributions in the South Pacific was not meant to be a criticism. Peters assures us that he was calling for both sides to recognize the positive aspects of our ties. Peters is being a bit disingenuous, as he delivered his remarks -- as an unscripted portion of a seminar speech -- in characteristic firebrand style. But the Embassy believes Peters genuinely wants to improve the bilateral relationship, and he'll be more likely to succeed in getting domestic support for his efforts if he is not perceived as an unquestioning supporter of U.S. policies. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) New Zealand Foreign Minister Winston Peters' February 21 speech to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs was intended to outline GNZ views on New Zealand's Foreign Policy objectives over the next five years. However, in off-the-cuff remarks, Peters said it was regrettable that the United States does not appreciate all that New Zealand is doing in the South Pacific. He said, "We have the ability to influence in a positive way the views and opinions of one quarter of the globe out here in the Pacific, all the way beyond Tahiti to Easter Island. Our connection with the Pacific in dealing with the United States is important, and I suspect it may be something that they have for so long overlooked but in which we have placed so much effort and time that we should remind them of what we've done and why we're doing it, so that they might better understand how 4.2 million people do matter in this world." In follow up questions from the media, Peters also said he would raise this point in Washington when he visited there, probably mid-year.

¶3. (SBU) This being New Zealand, the local media completely ignored the rest of Peter's thoughtful speech and focused on his having laid down a marker with the United States: stop focusing on the nuclear issue and pay attention to the positive aspects of the bilateral relationship. Most press coverage and several academic commentators agreed this was a useful message, although at least one observer remarked that it should be New Zealand's national interests -- not its need for praise -- that dictate the country's South Pacific policy.

¶4. (C) And of course the media also glossed over the

observation in Peter's speech that the country's foreign policy priorities over the next five years would place equal emphasis on bilateral, regional, and multilateral engagements. Peters' declaration that bilateral relationships are as important as multilateral institutions is significant, as many Kiwi officials and ordinary New Zealanders consider the UN to be a quasi-government to which New Zealand should declare allegiance. Although he noted the world would be much worse off without the UN, Peters stressed the need for UN reform to reflect today's world and he pledged New Zealand's constructive participation towards this goal. Peters also said that there is room for both the United States and New Zealand to get more benefit from their bilateral ties, which would come from recognizing our common interests and supporting each other on key issues where possible. Peters added that this was evident in his meeting with A/S Hill during the APEC Senior Officials meeting, as A/S Hill recognized that New Zealand's position on North Korea and its contributions to counter-terrorism efforts and regional security support U.S. objectives.

¶15. (SBU) The Embassy played down efforts by the New Zealand media to declare Peters' remarks a strong criticism of the United States. The Ambassador issued a statement that simply said, "As Admiral Fallon noted when he was here recently, the United States deeply appreciates the work that New Zealand does when it comes to critical security and stability issues in the region. I look forward to discussing this and other matters with Minister Peters in our continuing conversations." The Prime Minister and Defence (and former Foreign) Minister Phil Goff both supported Peters' remarks. However, in a meeting late last week, Peters himself told Centcom Commander General Abizaid that his comments about the U.S. lack of recognition of New Zealand's efforts in the region had been "misread." He also stressed this to the Ambassador at a one-on-one lunch on March 1. Peters said his

intention had been merely to show that the South Pacific in general falls under the radar screen and recognition of New Zealand's efforts in the region is therefore overshadowed by other world events.

¶16. (C) Comment: We believe Peters is sincere in his desire to improve US-New Zealand relations by exploring new areas in which to cooperate. Although the press almost ignored it, in remarks after his speech Peters also criticized the UK for overlooking the South Pacific despite Britain's historical legacy in the region. But Peters' ultimate objective was likely not to criticize us or Britain, but rather to prove that although he is out of the Cabinet he is still the Government's true messenger on foreign affairs issues. One local journalist remarked that Peters' speech also shows that despite the views of many, he is capable of handling his portfolio and anxious to leave his mark. Whatever the case, Peters' attempts to improve the bilateral relationship will get a fairer hearing from NZ officials and the Kiwi public if he is seen as being a bit skeptical about us.

McCormick